

## Daniel 7:1-14

### A Vision of Things to Come

<sup>1</sup> In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. <sup>2</sup> Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. <sup>3</sup> And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. <sup>4</sup> The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. <sup>5</sup> And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' <sup>6</sup> After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. <sup>7</sup> After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. <sup>8</sup> I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

<sup>9</sup> "As I looked,

thrones were placed,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;  
his clothing was white as snow,  
and the hair of his head like pure wool;  
his throne was fiery flames;  
its wheels were burning fire.

<sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued  
and came out from before him;  
a thousand thousands served him,  
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;  
the court sat in judgment,  
and the books were opened.

<sup>11</sup> "I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. <sup>12</sup> As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

<sup>13</sup> "I saw in the night visions,

and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
 there came one like a son of man,  
 and he came to the Ancient of Days  
 and was presented before him.  
<sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion  
 and glory and a kingdom,  
 that all peoples, nations, and languages  
 should serve him;  
 his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
 which shall not pass away,  
 and his kingdom one  
 that shall not be destroyed.” – Daniel 7:1-14 ESV

<sup>15</sup> “As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me.

<sup>16</sup> I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. <sup>17</sup> ‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. <sup>18</sup> But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’

<sup>19</sup> “Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, <sup>20</sup> and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. <sup>21</sup> As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, <sup>22</sup> until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

<sup>23</sup> “Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast,

there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth,  
 which shall be different from all the kingdoms,  
 and it shall devour the whole earth,  
 and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

<sup>24</sup> As for the ten horns,  
 out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise,  
 and another shall arise after them;  
 he shall be different from the former ones,  
 and shall put down three kings.

<sup>25</sup> He shall speak words against the Most High,  
 and shall wear out the saints of the Most High,  
 and shall think to change the times and the law;  
 and they shall be given into his hand  
 for a time, times, and half a time.

<sup>26</sup> *But the court shall sit in judgment,  
and his dominion shall be taken away,  
to be consumed and destroyed to the end.*

<sup>27</sup> *And the kingdom and the dominion  
and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven  
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;  
his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,  
and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'*

<sup>28</sup> *"Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart."* – Daniel 7:1-18 ESV

This chapter takes a decidedly different turn as Daniel, the interpreter of dreams, becomes the one who has had the dream. This event occurs in 553 B.C., the first year of Belshazzar's reign, placing Daniel in his mid-sixties. It had been 50 years since David interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the large statue destroyed by a massive stone. The mention of Belshazzar establishes the timing of Daniel's vision as being just 14 years before the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Medo-Persians in 539 B.C.

This chapter and the following five record a series of visions Yahweh gave to Daniel. Writing in the third person, Daniel matter-of-factly relates the nature of his dream.

*Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay in his bed. He wrote down the dream, and this is what he saw.* – Daniel 7:1 NLT

He expresses no fear or apprehension concerning the content of his vision but simply relays the facts of what he saw. With the details of the vision fresh in his mind, Daniel transferred them to paper so he wouldn't forget them. From this point forward, Daniel's narrative shifts to the first person, almost as if he is reading what he wrote.

*"I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another."* – Daniel 7:2-3 ESV

His demeanor seems detached, almost as if he is reading about someone else's experience. He provides no clues as to his emotional response at seeing these bizarre visions. There is no indication that the images of the "four great beasts" disturbed or upset him. He simply relays the details of their strange appearance in an almost clinical manner. But as the vision unfolds and its content becomes increasingly more disturbing, Daniel's calm demeanor will give way to concern and consternation.

*"As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me."* – Daniel 7:15 ESV

When the dream began, Daniel must have assumed that he would be able to discern its meaning. After all, he had successfully interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and Belshazzar's vision. But this time, the meaning would be provided by someone other than Daniel. In the middle of his dream, Daniel was given a glimpse in the heavenly realm where he saw, "someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 7:13 NLT).

This shift in the scene is critical and refocuses the emphasis of the dream. This one "like a son of man" was led into the presence of the Ancient One, a clear reference to Yahweh. This unidentified individual is said to be given "authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14 NLT).

This part of the vision is intended to provide a resolution and interpretation to all that Daniel saw as his dream began. Confused by the appearance of the strange-looking beasts, Daniel sought an explanation from "one of those standing beside the throne" (Daniel 7:16 NLT). He is informed that they represent four kingdoms. The first beast "was like a lion with eagles' wings..." (vs 4). The second "looked like a bear. It was rearing up on one side, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth" (vs 5). The third beast "looked like a leopard. It had four bird's wings on its back, and it had four heads" (vs 6). The fourth and final beast was "terrifying, dreadful, and very strong. It devoured and crushed its victims with huge iron teeth and trampled their remains beneath its feet...and it had ten horns" (vs 7).

Each beast seems to be greater and more ferocious than its predecessor. They are fierce, deadly, and wield great authority. But the final beast is different than all the rest, having on its head ten horns. But as Daniel discovered, these beasts were merely symbols for human kings and their kingdoms. These unidentified nations would appear one after the other, each defeating its predecessor and establishing its dominance as the world's most powerful kingdom.

But as Daniel viewed the rise and fall of these unnamed kingdoms, he was also given a vision of God on His "fiery throne with wheels of blazing fire" (Daniel 7:9 NLT), surrounded by a numberless host of angels and attendants. The scene is of a courtroom with God presiding as judge over all the earth. Books are opened and the court is declared to be in session. But as Daniel watches, he can't help but wonder what the final beast represents and why three of its ten horns were suddenly replaced by a much smaller horn. Confused by all the imagery, he asks for an explanation and is given one.

*"This fourth beast is the fourth world power that will rule the earth. It will be different from all the others. It will devour the whole world, trampling and crushing everything in its path. Its ten horns are ten kings who will rule that empire. Then another king will arise, different from the other ten, who will subdue three of them. He will defy the Most High and oppress the holy people of the Most High. He will try to change their sacred*

*festivals and laws, and they will be placed under his control for a time, times, and half a time.” – Daniel 7:23-25 NLT*

Daniel is unaware that his vision spans a vast period of time. He is being given a glimpse into future events that will take place long after he is gone and involves the nations of this world and the chosen people of God. These events will unfold over time and will culminate with God presiding as judge and final arbiter of the fates of kings and kingdoms. The final king who comes to power will meet his end at the hands of God Almighty.

*“...the court will pass judgment, and all his power will be taken away and completely destroyed. Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will last forever, and all rulers will serve and obey him.” – Daniel 7:26-27 NLT*

Nowhere in the vision is Daniel given the identities of the kings or kingdoms involved. He is not provided with a timeline or a detailed summary of future world events. It is all painfully vague and non-specific. It was not important for Daniel to have a play-by-play outline of things to come. All he needed to know was that Yahweh was in full control of all that would happen. The names of the players were unimportant. The identities of the nations were irrelevant. Kingdoms would come and go. Kings would rise and fall. But God’s kingdom would stand forever.

Daniel would live through the reigns of several kings, but God was letting him know that the future was secure. While Daniel would die in Babylon, the people of God would eventually return to the land of Judah. God was not done, and His will was not yet fulfilled. This vision was intended to assure Daniel of God’s sovereignty. It did not provide Daniel with dates, times, and details, but it did provide him with the assurance that Yahweh’s “kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7:27 ESV).

But the lack of specificity seems to have left Daniel less than comforted.

*“As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart.” – Daniel 7:28 ESV*

He wanted details but was given a sweeping overview of future events that left much to the imagination. He must have wondered if Belshazzar was one of the four beasts and, if so, which one. He must have questioned the timing of these future events and speculated if he would live long enough to see and experience them. But God left out those details. It was enough for Daniel to know that God was sovereign and orchestrating world events from His vantage point in heaven. He was still on His throne and fully in control. Daniel had nothing to fear.

The beasts arise out of “the great sea,” which is likely a reference to the Mediterranean Sea. As verse 17 makes clear, the four beasts represent four kings.

